

ABSTRACT

THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE AND ITS EFFECT ON  
EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH IN 31 CALIFORNIA COUNTIES

By

Cynthia Rivera-Acuna

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The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between high school graduation rates and emancipation outcomes. Secondary data from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) database was used to develop a quantitative study on related variables. Findings indicate that there was a significant relationship between high school completion and independent living program completion rates. The study also discovered that there was a significant relationship between high school completion and housing obtainment rates. Further, this study verified that there was a significant relationship between high school completion and permanency connection rates. The study can be helpful for those providing services to emancipated youth.



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EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH IN 31 CALIFORNIA COUNTIES

A THESIS

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Committee Members:

Janaki Santhiveeran, Ph.D. (Chair)  
Venetta Campbell, Psy.D.  
Lisa Jennings, Ph.D.

College Designee:

Nancy Meyer-Adams, Ph.D.

By Cynthia Rivera-Acuna

B.A., 2006, University of California, Berkeley

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement .....	1
Purpose .....	3
Research Questions .....	3
Definitions .....	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
Child Welfare .....	6
Emancipation .....	8
Education .....	12
Employment .....	15
Policy .....	17
Permanency Connections .....	19
Independent Living Program (ILP) .....	20
Housing .....	22
3. METHODOLOGY .....	26
Design of the Study .....	26
Sampling and Data Retrieval .....	27
Data Analysis .....	28
Social Work Ethics .....	28
Relevance to Children, Youth and Family Concentration .....	28
Relevance to Social Work and Multicultural Practice .....	29
Limitations of the Study Methodology .....	29

CHAPTER	Page
4. RESULTS .....	30
Demographics .....	30
5. LESSONS LEARNED .....	41
Summary of Findings .....	41
Comparison of Study Findings with Prior Research	41
Implications for Social Work Practice .....	43
Recommendations for Future Research .....	44
Implications for Policy and Advocacy .....	44
Limitations .....	45
Conclusion .....	46
APPENDIX: DATA RETRIEVAL FORM.....	47
REFERENCES.....	49



LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1. Demographics of Sample .....	32
2. School Age .....	32
3. High School Completion Correlation Analysis .....	34
4. Kinship Placement Correlation Analysis .....	34
5. Foster Care Placement Correlation Analysis .....	35
6. Foster Family Agency Correlation Analysis .....	36
7. Group Home Agency Correlation Analysis .....	37
8. Guardianship Placement Correlation Analysis .....	38
9. Ethnicity and Correlation Analysis .....	40

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

The foster care journey of emancipation has various outcomes. Reily (2003) found that many foster youth who exited the child welfare system ended up homeless, incarcerated, unemployed, or had early pregnancies. However, if foster youth have successful outcomes, they will not have to depend on government aid or become homeless (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). Foster youth can receive help to achieve successful outcomes. Macro level interventions established different programs that allow foster youth to gain independent living skills. For instance, Title IV-E Independent Living Program began in 1986 and it was meant to help youth transition into adulthood (Mares, 2010). Further, the Foster Care Independence Act and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) legislation amended the 1986 Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). CFCIP removes age barriers as it allows youth to receive services like independent living skills, secondary

education, health care, and counseling until age 21 (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

Moreover, the Fostering Connections to Success Act, also known as Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12) was signed into law in California on September 30, 2010 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (Lemley, Dow, Schwartz, Heimov, & Elliott, 2013). AB 12 provides resources for foster youth to become self-sufficient and have greater opportunities to succeed independently and allows youth to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday (Lemley et al., 2013). Youth need to complete high school or obtain a General Education Degree (GED), enroll in a vocational, community, or state college, take part in a program that will provide employment assistance and remove professional barriers, work for at least 80 hours per month, or have a medical condition that will impede one of the above requirements in order to qualify for AB 12 services (Lemley et al., 2013). Furthermore, the youth are required to be a dependent of the court, the social worker will maintain monthly contact with the youth, and the social worker will report the youth's progress every six months to the court (Lemley et al., 2013).

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how emancipated foster youths' high school graduation rates are associated with various emancipation outcomes among select counties in California. The research provided insight on emancipation outcomes of California's emancipated foster youth.

## Research Questions

This study answered the following questions:

1. How are high school graduation rates of counties in California associated with foster youths' participation in The Independent living program participation rates?
2. How are high school graduation rates of counties in California associated with foster youths' housing obtainment rates?
3. How are high school graduation rates of counties in California associated with foster youths' permanency connection rates?
4. How are high school graduation rates of counties in California associated with foster youths' employment attainment rates?

5. How are high school graduation rates of counties in California associated with foster youths' housing obtainment?

#### Definitions

*Emancipation:* "Emancipation from foster care occurs when young people have 'aged out' (reached an age of majority) of out-of-home care and left the foster care system" (Casey Family Programs, 2010, "Emancipation").

*Foster youth:* "The legal definition of a foster youth is a child without parental support and protection, placed with a person or family to be cared for, usually by local welfare services or by court order" (Doolittle, 2013, p. 3).

*Independent Living Program (ILP):* ILP is a program, which provides training, services, and programs to assist current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency prior to and after leaving the foster care system. ILP was authorized by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (California Department of Social Services, 2007).

*John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program:* According to Casey and Family programs (2010), It is authorized by Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. It offers assistance to help older youth in care

and former foster youth (age 18-21) acquire training and independent living skills so they can become self-sufficient. Funding is provided to states with approved plans and can be used for assisting youth with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and other activities (para. 11).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Child Welfare

The child welfare field has various components. Pecora, et al. (2006) mention that initial placement into foster care is due to child maltreatment that can include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or general neglect (Pecora et al., 2006). Further, many youth have multiple placements while in foster care and as a result, foster youth attend many schools (Pecora et al., 2006). Keller, Cusick, and Courtney (2007) mention that the "foster care drift" involves foster youth spending years in foster care moving to different placements and drifting through the system (p. 454). Moreover, the Adoptions and Safe Family Act (ASFA) addresses the foster care drift as it provides permanency as biological parents are given 22 months to try to reunify with their children (Keller et al., 2007). Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, and Painter (2007) mention that foster care youth tend to have higher behavioral problems and mental health needs. Also, studies have shown that African American youth are overrepresented

in the foster care system (Scannapieco et al., 2007). Fifteen percent of children under the age of 18 are Black (Scannapieco et al., 2007). Further, 30% of black children are entering foster care; while 42% are living in foster care (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) indicates that for the year 2012, 254,162 children entered the foster care system. That same year, 241,254 children exited foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Further, 2,412 (1%) of foster youth were in an independently living housing placement; 14,475 (6%) of youth were in a group home placement; and 67,551 (28%) of youth were in relative placement (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Of the 241,254 children who exited foster care, 24,125 (10%) emancipated (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Out of 241,254 youth, 108,564 (45%) were white; 53,075 (22%) were black; and 50,663 (21%) were Hispanic (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Also, Perez and Romo (2011) explain that between 2001 and 2004, the Latino foster care population increased and surpassed both African American and White children in placements in Texas. Many foster youth are disconnected from their



community as they are placed in non-Latino homes (Perez & Romo, 2011).

### Emancipation

Foster youth who reach an age of majority, which is typically 18-21, emancipate or age out of the foster care system and have to fend on their own and have no safety net which can be challenging (Keller et al., 2007). Keller et al. (2007) suggest that support services should be offered to emancipated youth, whether they meet the requirements or not. Further, research has shown that youth who have been allowed to stay in the child welfare system beyond the age of 18 tend to have better outcomes as they are in route to complete high school (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011). Also, it is believed that a typical person is ready to live on his or her own at the age of 26, yet foster youth are expected to be ready at the age of 18 (Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, & McCready, 2008). In addition, emancipation leads to the foster youth parting from their previous caregiver and system they knew (Keller et al., 2007). Sadly, Packard et al. (2008) found that former foster youth make 40% of persons living in homeless shelters upon emancipation.

Packard et al. (2008) found that a high percentage of the nation's prison population is composed of former foster

youth and female former foster youth are more likely to be receiving public assistance. Salazar (2013) found that former foster youth tend to have more mental health issues compared to the general population. Additionally, even if former foster youth completed higher education, they still experienced housing instability (Salazar, 2013). However, foster youth listed community involvement as a form of resilience; for example, some youth mentioned being involved in church that helped them keep motivated in their journey upon emancipation (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

In addition, Long, Downs, Gillette, Sight, and Konen (2006) mentioned that Native American youth who emancipate have to learn Western society norms and tribe norms that can be challenging. Tribes feel that some life skills Native American youth need include money; resources; spirituality; interdependence; intergenerational learning; and tribal identity. This again adds another layer that Native American youth need for emancipation and independent living skills (Long et al., 2006).

In a study by Havlicek (2011), 252 youth were randomly selected and about 168 youth were employed prior to leaving the child welfare system. Youth, who had fewer placement changes and completed high school, had higher odds of being

employed (Havlicek, 2011). About 6,597 foster youth entered the child welfare system as adolescents and 3,409 went through five or more placements (Havlicek, 2011). Foster youth that had more placements had worse outcomes as they had higher probabilities of government assistance, poor educational outcomes, single parenting, and were in need of mental health services (Havlicek, 2011).

In addition, Havlicek (2011) notes that foster youth who experienced more than three placement changes had higher probabilities of instability during their transition to adulthood. Also, the older youth are once they enter into foster care, the more likely they will experience placement moves (Havlicek, 2011). Augsberger (2014) explains that foster youth should participate in their emancipation plan. Also, Augsberger discusses that the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 allows the state to involve youth in the development of their case plans and in the design of independent living programs. Further, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allows the youth to participate in their emancipation plan 90 days prior to their emancipation (Augsberger, 2014). Team decision-making meetings, family team conferencing, or permanency teaming process are

examples of meetings used to discuss emancipation plans for youth (Augsberger, 2014). Augsberger believes that having youth participate in the emancipation plan is not only strength based, but it is also empowering for the youth. Youth also felt more willing to participate in the conference when they understood the purpose and when they felt comfortable with participants (Augsberger, 2014).

Moreover, Scannapieco et al. (2007) explain that foster youth want to be more involved in the plans that are made for them. They also mention that social workers working with transitional youth have the power to positively influence youth (Scannapieco et al., 2007). Furthermore, Scannapieco et al. (2007) found that a placement is not terminated when a youth reaches 18 years of age; a placement is not a place to live, and placement not a plan. Instead, it is a state of mind that involves positive and supportive relationships that last a lifetime (Scannapieco et al., 2007). Living independently is not the goal, but rather living interdependently is the goal as we all need others and our community to function (Scannapieco et al., 2007).

## Education

There are many barriers preventing academic achievement that affect graduation rates among foster youth. These barriers include placement instability, inadequate school programs, multiple school transfers, gaps in enrollment, difficulties in accumulating and calculating school credits, delays in transferring school records, and difficulties in screening and evaluation for special education programs (Altshuler, 1997). This makes it harder for youth to succeed in life and to be able to live independently. Altshuler (1997) argued that educational deficits accrued while a child is in foster care, are correlated to deficits in adulthood. Issues such as stable employment, housing, and overall self-sufficiency are greatly affected by high school graduation status (Altshuler, 1997). Education is an important aspect that can facilitate upward mobility, but the lack of education can lead to downward mobility.

In addition, former foster youth who do not graduate from high school are at a significantly higher risk of being unemployed, underemployed, receiving government benefits, and having a high level of criminal justice involvement (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). High school

graduation is the desired academic outcome for foster youth because it predicts positive long-term outcomes (Geenen & Powers, 2006). However, research revealed that youth in foster care were 57% less likely to graduate from high school as compared to their non-foster care peers (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Even after emancipation, 39% of California foster youth did not complete high school or pursue their GED (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

Foster youth attending college is low and the foster youth who do graduate from college take longer to complete their degree (Jones, 2012). Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, and Colvin (2013) mention that only 10% of foster youth attend college and only 4% obtain a bachelor's degree. Moreover, Pecora (2012) mentions that former foster youth in college mentioned that having emotional and academic support helped them with their education. Additionally, foster youth who had multiple placements struggled in school (Gustavsson, & MacEachron, 2012). Also, foster youth rarely enroll in advance placement classes in high school and many are not encouraged to pursue college (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012). Merdinger, Hines, Lemon Osterling, and Wyatt (2005) looked at the Pathways to College study that included 216 emancipated foster youth attending a four-year university.

The average age of former foster youth entering the foster care system is 10 years of age; they spend an average of 7 to 8 years in out-of-home-care and had on average about three different placements (Merdinger et al., 2005).

Further, in the Pathways to College study, former foster youth attended one or two high schools and were involved in extracurricular activities (Merdinger et al., 2005). Additionally, about 80% had completed high school or some college before emancipation; more than 50% went to a community college and then transferred to a four-year college (Merdinger et al., 2005). Respondents indicated that they attended college due to financial aid information, college advisement, and college preparation classes (Merdinger et al., 2005). Merdinger et al. state that, "after emancipation, 40.5% of this sample of college-attending, former foster youth felt only somewhat prepared for independent living, while 35% indicated they were not well prepared" (p. 891). The youth indicate that they are supporting themselves mostly by financial aid, but their financial situation is worse than others (Merdinger et al., 2005). Eighty percent of youth stated that they had someone who they can turn to for advice and that was helpful for them (Merdinger et al., 2005). Also, Harris,

Jackson, O'Brien, and Pecora (2009) explain that in Washington State, youth leaving foster care at age 18 or older in 2000 (January to June), 34% had a high school diploma or GED and 28% had dropped out of school. Also foster youth score lower in statewide achievement tests, repeat a grade, or are enrolled in special education programs at a higher rate when compared to non-foster youth (Harris et al., 2009).

#### Employment

Foster youth have difficulties obtaining employment and if they had employment, youth are getting paid low wages (Atkinson, 2008). Harris et al. (2009) explained that foster youth have poor job preparation and they lack job experience, which is not helpful when looking for employment. Also, foster youth progress slower in the labor market (Harris et al., 2009). Further, foster youth live in poverty and rely on government assistance (Henig, 2009). Moreover, Henig (2009) mentions that having stable employment will facilitate foster youth to pay for housing. Foster youth who leave care without any employment experience tend to get low-skills job and earn low-wages (Jones, 2012).



Additionally, youth exiting foster care after the age of 18 have better employment outcomes (Stewart, Kum, H., Barth, & Duncan, 2014). Further, Stewart et al. (2014) mention that former foster youth struggle to maintain employment at the age of 30. Stewart et al. (2014) mention that the Midwest Study looked at former foster youth (sample of 732) who aged out of foster care from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin; from the Midwest Study, only 40% of former foster youth were employed at age 19 compared to other 19 year olds where 58% were employed. Longer stays in foster care provided more stable employment and if youth were employed before age 18, the youth had more favorable employment outcomes (Hook & Courtney, 2011). Having employment prior to age 18, allows youth to develop working skills and gain experience that will make them more competitive in the labor market. Additionally, Courtney and Hook (2011) mention that former foster youth's prediction of employment and wages is based on an individual's human capital, which is measured via educational attainment. Hook and Courtney (2011) mention that youth's high school completion is low and this can be due to constant placement changes, school changes, and also attending low performing schools. They also further

explore foster youth's criminal involvement and how having convictions affects employment obtainment (Hook & Courtney, 2011).

Also, Hook and Courtney (2011) state that incarcerations and convictions affect foster youth's personal capital. Moreover, female job obtainment is challenging as former foster youth females tend to begin motherhood early; many cannot accept employment as they do not have reliable childcare or they cannot afford childcare (Hook & Courtney, 2011). Additionally, Hook and Courtney also mention that youth's experience in foster care can hinder their social capital as they may not have ties to social networks that can help with job obtainment.

#### Policy

President Bill Clinton signed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) in 1999 and it established the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Collins, 2004). FCIA intended to help states establish an improved Independent Living Program that provides extended Medicaid coverage, increases funding, ensure foster parents are prepared to care for transitional youth, and increase funds for adoption. Further, the Chafee independence Program allowed flexible funding to states (Collins, 2004). The

Chafee Independence Program intended to help foster youth who remained in care until age 18 and it intended to provide services that would help youth obtain a high school diploma, daily living skills, and financial management (Collins, 2004). Also, Chafee Independence Program intended to provide job training, housing assistance, personal and emotional support, and other services to help youth become self sufficient (Collins, 2004).

Moreover, Assembly Bill 12 (AB12) provides placement flexibility as youth can live in a group home, foster home, or independent living housing (Courtney, Dworsky, & Napolitano, 2013). Also, AB 12 allows foster youth to re-enter into the foster care system numerous times before they reach 21 years of age (Courtney et al., 2013). Courtney et al. (2013) explain that some foster youth felt it was not fair that there are so many strict requirements to qualify for AB 12; foster youth felt that extending foster care to age 24 would be better. Further, AB 12 also incorporates California's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-Gap), which will be paid with federal funds instead of state funds (Courtney et al., 2013). Courtney et al. explain that AB 12 provides "extended Kin-Gap and Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) subsidies for youth who

are at least 18 but not yet 20 years old as long as the Kin-GAP payments or the initial AAP agreement began on or after their 16th birthday" (p.9). Also, AB 12 allows non-relative legal guardianships with youth who were at least 18, but not 20 years old, to receive state funded foster care benefits as long as it is a Court approved placement (Courtney et al., 2013). AB 12 also allows for youth in extended foster care who are 18 years, but not 20 years yet, the ability to receive CALWORKs benefits and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANAF) if they are living in an approved relative placement and if they are not eligible for foster care payments (Courtney et al., 2013).

#### Permanency Connections

Greeson and Bowen (2008) found that having at least one caring adult was a protective factor for youth that can help them. Additionally, mentoring, and a caring relationship, helped emancipated youth (Greeson & Bowen, 2008). Jones (2013) found that the youth from general population left their home at age 23 and still have the opportunity to return home if needed. Additionally, emancipated foster youth used family support for money and friends for advice (Jones, 2013). Osterling and Hines (2006) found that foster youth felt mentors were reliable

and supportive. Additionally, mentors helped foster youth in obtaining a job, opening a bank account, and completing their education (Osterling & Hines, 2006).

Additionally, Collins, Paris, and Ward (2008) found that many transitional age youth reconnected or reunified with their biological family after they left the foster care system to reduce the risk of becoming homeless. Youth who reunified and reconnected with family members post emancipation did so in hopes of finding support and reconnecting to familial ties; however, they faced challenges such as having a lack of attachment and conflicts with family members (Collins et al., 2008).

Also, Keller et al. (2007) found that youth who lived in a group home, had a harder time developing lasting relationships as there is a high turnover rate of staff. Kinship care can be less traumatic for youth as there is usually a pre-established relationship (Keller et al, 2007). However, one of the challenges with Kinship care is that care providers do not receive the same financial support as non-relative caregivers (Keller et al, 2007).

#### Independent Living Program (ILP)

Several studies have explored the importance of Independent Living Programs (ILP) and how they benefited

diverse youth. In Iglehart and Becerra's (2002) study of African American and Hispanic emancipated youth, participants recalled ILP in terms of the staff that helped them and people they met. Further, African American, and Hispanic emancipated youth also recalled some budgeting classes that helped them (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). Other participants stated that although ILP classes were informative, they were not ready to fully pay attention (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). Lastly, participants stated that it would be a good idea for emancipated youth to speak with youth who will be emancipating soon (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002). Further, Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2005) in their study found that participants in the ILP program were taught how to open a bank account, find a job, and find a place to live.

Packard et al. (2008) mention that youth who participate in multifaceted independent living programs that include housing, educational services, mentoring, employment skills, and independent living skills have far better outcomes. Packard et al. (2008) explain that in Oakland, California, there is an independent living program called First Place Fund and the program owns the independent living homes that youth reside in. First Place

Fund has the youth pay a small amount of rent at the beginning and increase as time goes by. Packard et al. (2008) suggest that if youth are able to succeed in the independent living programs, then this could benefit states as there will be less youth in the jail system and on government aid. Moreover, Stott (2013) mentions that many youth in group homes are not allowed to use screwdrivers, kitchen knives, or cleaning supply due to liability. This can prevent the youth in obtaining certain living skills that are ordinary and useful. McCoy, McMillen, and Spitznagel (2008) mention that there are assessment tools that assess youth's independent living skills (e.g. Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment). This can be helpful so that youth can receive help in the areas they need help in the most.

### Housing

Rashid (2004) found that foster youth who emancipate experience homelessness, stay in homeless shelters, and move from home to home of friends. Also, Berzin, Rhodes, and Curtis (2011) mention that foster youth did not feel prepared for the home search process once they emancipated. Also, foster youth may end up finding housing in unsafe

neighborhoods because that is what they can afford (Berzin et al., 2011).

In addition, Jones (2011) explores the differences between youth who emancipated and stayed in transitional housing and youth that made other living arrangements. Jones (2011) looks at 106 former foster youth and found that youth who stayed in transitional housing tended to be more stable, be employed, used drug substances less, and had less criminal involvement than youth who made other living arrangements. Youth who lived in the transitional housing program, receive independent living services and they received supervision by supportive staff (Jones, 2011). Youth also received case management support and access to community resources (Jones 2011). In order to be eligible for the housing program, youth had to be able to emancipate from foster care, be working or looking for employment, attending school, and participating in the Independent Living Program (Jones, 2011). Youth paid a certain amount of rent, but that is so youth are able to save money (Jones, 2011). Perez and Romo (2011) mention that many youth who emancipate survive by "couch surfing" as they stay from friend's home to home.



Yen, Powell Hammond, & Kushel (2009) found that housing instability includes having difficulty paying rent, moving frequently, living in crowded conditions, and spending a high percentage of your income to pay rent. Yen et al. (2009) explore the outcomes of 31 former foster youth in San Francisco and Oakland and look at how housing instability and how it affects healthcare. Youth pointed out that sometimes their current housing location was far in terms of medical providers that accepted Medi-Cal (Yen et al., 2009).

Another youth stated that she had made a medical appointment, but recently started working, and could not take the day off (Yen et al., 2009). Further, other youth, mentioned that following ILP requirements took a lot of their time, that they did not have time to make doctor appointments (Yen et al., 2009). Many youth had caseworkers and felt they did not provide enough information about healthcare resources (Yen et al., 2009). Females who were living in transitional housing and had a child had their own room, but males who had a child, did not get their own room (Yen et al., 2009).

Moreover, many youth complained that they did not feel they had enough privacy in their current housing situation

(Yen et al., 2009). Female youth would receive medical care for contraceptives and pregnancy associated care (Yen et al., 2009). If the females had children, they would get regular check-up and immunization care for their child (Yen et al., 2009). Male foster youth on the other hand, would only get medical care when they were severely injured (Yen et al., 2009). Further, youth in transitional housing felt that they did not have much autonomy as they had to show receipts and their living places were observed to see if they were maintaining a clean living space (Yen et al., 2009). Youth felt that medical providers treated them like second hand citizens because they had Medi-Cal (Yen et al., 2009). Additionally, youth also felt mistrust of the medical providers and were not certain with the information the medical staff provided (Yen et al., 2009).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design of the Study

This exploratory, quantitative study explored the relationship between graduation rates of emancipated youth and their emancipation outcomes for counties in California. Further, this study retrieved data from existing databases from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) database, which is a collaboration between the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS; Needell et al., 2014). This database gathered countywide data of supervised youth, specifically, "Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care" (Needell et al., 2014). Additionally, the CCWIP database retrieved data on the Entries to Foster Care by County (Needell et al., 2014). Also, the State of California Department of Finance gathered data on the high school graduates' race and age, by Counties in California (Department of Finance, 2013a, 2013b).

### Sampling and Data Retrieval

The data sample included the counties in California; thus, no survey or questionnaires was administered. The twenty-four counties that did not report on emancipated youth and two counties that had zero participants for the independent living program were not used in this study. As a result, the sample size for the proposed study was 31 counties. The study retrieved data for the following variables: (1) Completion of High School or Equivalency; (2) Employment Attainment; (3) Housing Obtainment; (4) Permanency Connection; and (5) Independent Living Services (Needell et al., 2014).

Additionally, the CCWIP database in regards to California counties placement type included the following variables: (1) Kinship; (2) Foster care; (3) Foster Family Agency; (4) Group home; (5) Shelter; and (6) Guardianship (Needell et al., 2014). Further, the Department of Finance Database, in regards to age groups in California counties, included the following variables: (1) Preschool (age 0-4); and (2) School age (age 5-17; Department of Finance, 2013). Additionally, the Department of Finance Database included high school graduation rates and ethnicity of emancipated youth for all counties in California (Department of

Finance, 2013a). All data was entered in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (2014).

#### Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (2014) was used in this research study to analyze the data. Frequency distributions and percentages were presented for all study variables. Additionally, bivariate correlations were used to test the research questions.

#### Social Work Ethics

There was no contact with foster youth; thus, there were no risks. The secondary databases ensured anonymity, as there was no identifying information of participants. Further, the databases are publicly accessible via the Internet.

#### Relevance to Children, Youth and Family Concentration

Foster youth are an important avenue to explore as a children's social worker. Working with foster youth has created the need to learn more about foster youth in order to better serve that population. Foster youth are survivors that inspire hope and if we can find out how to better serve this population, their opportunities can be endless.

### Relevance to Social Work and Multicultural Practice

The National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics elaborates that we must fight for social justice and foster youth deserve to be fought for (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2014). By researching this field, social workers can help foster youth have better outcomes. The study of program and policies can provide efficiency and thus provide more funding or make adjustments. This project can help social workers develop cultural competence and help them better serve foster youth.

A multicultural approach can provide the differences in regards to race and ethnicity, while highlighting commonalities that helped foster youth successfully emancipate.

### Limitations of the Study Methodology

As secondary data was used, the researcher is limited in terms of availability of variables to test research questions. Additionally, it is unclear how data for certain variables were collected. Moreover, the researcher has to rely on the method used to obtain data for the databases.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Demographics

The unit of analysis for this study is a county in the state of California. The study sample consisted of 31 counties. Table 1 illustrates the frequencies and percentages for the county characteristics of this study. The average ethnicity across all 31 counties was measured. On an average each county had 392,436 Whites with a minimum of 15,224 and a maximum of 2,746,305 ( $SD = 576,326$ ). On an average each county had 399,986 Hispanics or Latinos with a minimum of 1,677 and a maximum of 4,694,972 ( $SD = 860,451$ ). On an average each county had 64,892 Blacks or African Americans with a minimum of 118 and a maximum of 821,829 ( $SD = 151,690$ ). On an average each county had 11,647 ( $SD = 2,026$ ) students enrolled in high school, with a minimum of 152 students and a maximum of 10,485 students.

Table 1 also summarizes the frequencies and percentages of placement entry into the Child Welfare system. Kinship placements were utilized an average of 23% ( $SD = 13\%$ ) of the time per county, with a minimum of 1% and

a maximum of 56% for all counties. Foster care placements were utilized an average of 21% ( $SD = 17\%$ ) of the time per county, with a minimum of 1% and a maximum of 70% for all counties used in the study. Moreover, foster family agency placements were utilized an average of 42% ( $SD = 23\%$ ) of the time per county, with a minimum of 4% and a maximum of 87%. In addition, group home placements were utilized on an average of 7% of the time, with a minimum of 1% and a maximum of 29%. Lastly, guardianship placements were utilized an average of 3% of the time per county, with a minimum of 1% and a maximum of 11%.

Table 2 summarizes the median age for youth in preschool and school across all 31 counties. The median age for preschool youth was 22,090 for all counties used in the study with a minimum of 769 and a maximum of 642,002. The median age for school youth was 58,345 for all counties used in the study. The minimum was 2,453 with a maximum of 1,745,308.

Table 3 displays the results of a bivariate correlation analyses that was conducted to examine how emancipated youths' high school completion rate from each county was associated with employment, housing, the independent living program, and permanency connection



TABLE 1. Demographics of Sample (N = 31\*)

Factor	Mean	SD
Ethnicity		
White	392,436	576,326
Hispanic or Latino	399,986	860,451
Black or African American	64,892	151,690
Asian/Pacific Islander	137,304	272,596
American Indian	3,819	4,439
Pacific Islander	3,669	5,685
Multi-Race	24,747	38,136
High School		
Enrollment	11,647	20,269
Placement Type		
Kinship	23%	13%
Foster care	21%	17%
Foster Family	42%	23%
Group Home	7%	8%
Guardianship	3%	2%

\*Counties in California

TABLE 2. School Age (N = 31\*)

Factor	Median
Age	
Preschool	22,090
School	58,345

\*Counties in California

rates. The results indicated that there was no relationship between emancipated youths' high school completion and employment outcomes. There was a statistically significant strong positive correlation between high school completion and housing obtainment ( $r = .606$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Further, a statistically significant strong positive correlation existed between emancipated

youths' high school completion rate from each county and rate of participation in the Independent Living Program ( $r = .550$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Lastly, a statistically significant strong positive correlation existed between emancipated youths' high school completion rate from each county and rate of permanency connection ( $r = .475$ ;  $p < .005$ ).

Table 4 demonstrates the results of bivariate correlation analyses that were conducted to examine the relationships between emancipated youths' kinship placement from each county and foster care placement rates and its impact on high school completion, employment outcomes, housing obtainment, Independent Living Program participation, and permanency connection rates. There is no relationship between kinship placement with high school completion ( $r = -.191$ ;  $p < .303$ ); employment outcomes ( $r = -.176$ ;  $p < .343$ ); housing obtainment ( $r = .105$ ;  $p < .573$ ); participation in Independent Living Program ( $r = .062$ ;  $p < .741$ ), and permanency connection rates ( $r = -.125$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Likewise, there is no relationship between foster care placement and high school completion ( $r = .087$ ;  $p < .005$ ); employment outcomes ( $r = -.176$ ;  $p < .343$ ); housing obtainment ( $r = .105$ ;  $p < .573$ ); participation in Independent Living Program ( $r = .062$ ;  $p < .741$ ), and

TABLE 3. High School Completion Correlation Analysis  
(*N* = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
High School Completion vs. Employment	.286	.118
High School Completion vs. Housing	.606	.000
High School Completion vs. ILP**	.550	.001
High School Completion vs. Permanency	.475	.007

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

TABLE 4. Kinship Placement Correlation Analysis (*N* = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Kinship Placement vs. High School Completion	-.191	.303
Kinship Placement vs. Employment Status	-.176	.343
Kinship Placement vs. Housing	.105	.573
Kinship Placement vs. ILP**	.062	.741
Kinship Placement vs. Permanency	-.125	.503

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

permanency connection rates ( $r = -.125$ ;  $p < .503$ ; see Table 5).

Table 6 exhibits the bivariate correlation results that were conducted to examine emancipated youth's foster family agency placement from each county and its relationship between high school completion, employment

TABLE 5. Foster Care Placement Correlation Analysis  
(N = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Foster care placement vs. high school completion	.087	.652
Foster care placement vs. employment status	-.201	.296
Foster care placement vs. housing obtainment	-.116	.549
Foster care placement vs. ILP**	-.094	.628
Foster care placement vs. permanency connection	-.155	.423

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

outcomes, housing obtainment, independent living program participation, and permanency connections rates.

There is no correlation between foster care placement type and high school completion ( $r = -.231$ ;  $p < .211$ ); employment outcomes ( $r = -.138$ ;  $p < .460$ ); independent living program participation ( $r = -.208$ ;  $p < .260$ ); and permanency connection ( $r = -.033$ ;  $p < .986$ ) rates. However, there is a statistically significant and moderate, negative correlation between foster care placement and housing obtainment rates ( $r = -.349$ ;  $p < .005$ ).

There is no relationship amongst group home placement from each county and high school completion ( $r = .076$ ;  $p < .705$ ); employment outcomes ( $r = .087$ ;  $p < .666$ ); housing

TABLE 6. Foster Family Agency Correlation Analysis  
(N = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Foster Family Agency vs. High School Completion	-.231	.211
Foster Family Agency vs. Employment Status	-.138	.460
Foster Family Agency vs. Housing Obtainment	-.349	.054
Foster Family Agency vs. **ILP	-.208	.260
Foster Family Agency vs. Permanency Connection	-.033	.986

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

obtainment ( $r = .262$ ;  $p < .188$ ); participation in independent living program ( $r = .369$ ;  $p < .058$ ); and permanency connection ( $r = .048$ ;  $p < .812$ ) rates (Table 7). However, there is a statistically significant moderate, negative correlation between guardianship placement and high school completion ( $r = -.468$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Further, the relationship between guardianship placement and Independent Living Program ( $r = -.380$ ;  $p < .061$ ) is approaching significance. The findings are illustrated in Table 8.

In regards to ethnicity and housing obtainment from each county, Table 9 displays that there is a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between rate of White emancipated youth and housing obtainment rate ( $r =$

TABLE 7. Group Home Agency Correlation Analysis (N = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Group Home vs. High School Completion	.076	.705
Group Home vs. Employment Status	.087	.666
Group Home vs. Housing Obtainment	.262	.188
Group Home vs. ILP**	.369	.058
Group Home vs. Permanency Connection	.048	.812

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

.367;  $p < .005$ ). In addition, there is a statistically significant positive, moderate relationship amongst rate of Pacific Islander emancipated youth and housing obtainment rate ( $r = .364$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Likewise, there is a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation for rate of Multi-Race emancipated youth and housing obtainment rate ( $r = .370$ ;  $p < .005$ ).

Table 9 also displays the correlation between independent living program from each county and ethnicity. There is a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between the rate of White emancipated youth and independent living program ( $r = .493$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Also, there is a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between rate of American Indian emancipated youth and independent living program participation rate ( $r$

TABLE 8. Guardianship Placement Correlation Analysis  
(N = 31\*)

Category	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Guardianship vs. High School Completion	-.468	.018
Guardianship vs. Employment Status	-.233	.263
Guardianship vs. Housing Obtainment	-.331	.106
Guardianship vs. Independent Living Program	-.380	.061
Guardianship vs. Permanency connection	-.030	.887

\*Counties in California

\*\*Independent Living Program

= .406;  $p < .005$ ). Further, there is a statistically significant and positive strong relationship between rate of Asian emancipated youth and independent living program participation rate ( $r = .453$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Likewise, there is a statistically significant and positive strong relationship between rate of Pacific Islander emancipated youth and independent living program participation rate ( $r = .413$ ;  $p < .005$ ). There is a statistically significant and positive, moderate relationship between rate of Hispanic emancipated youth and independent living participation rate program ( $r = .395$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Moreover, there is a statistically significant, positive strong correlation

for participation rate of Multi-race emancipated youth and independent living program participation rate ( $r = .472$ ;  $p < .005$ ).

Table 9 also shows the correlation between permanency connection and ethnicity. There is statistically significant and moderate, positive correlation between rate of American Indian emancipated youth and permanency connection participation rate ( $r = .406$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Also, there is statistically significant and moderate, positive correlation between rate of Pacific Islander emancipated youth permanency connection participation rate ( $r = .365$ ;  $p < .005$ ). Further, there is statistically significant and moderate, positive correlation between rate of multi-race emancipated youth and permanency connection participation rate ( $r = .375$ ;  $p < .005$ ).



TABLE 9. Ethnicity and Correlation Analysis (N = 31\*)

Scale	White	Pacific Islander	Multi- Race	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic
HO**						
<i>r</i>	.367	.364	.370	.350	.327	.298
<i>p</i>	.005	.005	.005	.054	.072	.104
PC***						
<i>r</i>	.352	.365	.375	.406	.296	.355
<i>p</i>	.061	.005	.005	.005	.106	.066
ILP****						
<i>r</i>	.367	.413	.472	.444	.453	.395
<i>p</i>	.005	.005	.005	.054	.072	.104

\*Counties in California

\*\*HO = Housing Obtainment

\*\*\*PC = Permanency Connection

\*\*\*\*ILP = Independent Living Program

## CHAPTER 5

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### Summary of Findings

This study assessed high school graduation rate and its effect on emancipated youth in 31 California counties. The study found that there is a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and independent living program completion rates. The study discovered that there is a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and housing obtainment rates. Further, this study verified that that there is a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and permanency connection rates. The study found that there is no significant relationship between high school completion and employment obtainment rates.

#### Comparison of Study Findings with Prior Research

The study found that there is a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and permanency connection rates of counties. Merdinger et al. (2005) found that having higher support and permanency connection helped emancipated youth succeed in high school

completion. Further, emancipated foster youth who pursued higher education, mentioned having a permanent connection and support system (Merdinger et al., 2005). Having a permanent connection helped foster youth with their education, as counties with higher high school completion rate also had higher rates in permanency connection.

Further, this study found a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and independent living program participation rates. Packard et al. (2008) found that youth who participate in multifaceted independent living programs that include educational services and independent living skills have far better outcomes. Further, Lemon et al. (2005) found that independent living programs help youth with educational services to help them complete high school and attend college. Participation in independent living skills program helped foster youth complete high school, as counties with higher high school completion rate also had higher rates in independent living skills programs.

Likewise, there was a statistically significant relationship between high school completion and housing obtainment rates. Stable housing is greatly affected by high school graduation status (Altshuler, 1997). Richards

(2014) found that a former foster youth who completed high school was allowed to stay in foster care while she was attending college and had housing and school paid . Having a high school diploma opened up more possibilities that helped foster youth with their future. Having a high school education helped foster youth with housing, as counties with higher high school completion rate also had higher rates in housing obtainment.

#### Implications for Social Work Practice

Foster youths' emancipation outcomes continue to be a concern as most youth do not have positive outcomes. Keller et al. (2007) suggest that support services should be offered to emancipated youth, whether they meet the requirements or not due to all the difficulties foster youth face. Providing emancipated youth support services, regardless if they meet the requirements can help many foster youth obtain stable housing and give them more preparation time to become independent. Further, NASW's (2014) Code of Ethics suggests that service is a principle for all social workers. Thus, social workers should serve emancipated youth to prepare them for independence.

### Recommendations for Future Research

County data in regards to emancipated youths' outcomes will be helpful for future research. Since Counties vary, it will be helpful to see what works for certain counties and depending on the size of the county, if that approach can be used in another county. Further researcher in regards to policy would be helpful to see if policy is working or what modifications need to occur. A larger sample size for County data would also be helpful for future research and across different states via County data. More research needs to be done in the area of educational supportive programs that are offered to foster youth in relation to helping them graduate to see if the program can be replicated.

### Implications for Policy and Advocacy

In regards to current policy such as Assembly Bill 12 (AB12), The Fostering Connections to Success Act, current policy has certain requirements that youth must meet in order to qualify. Foster youth can remain in foster care until their 21st birthday, but need to complete high school or obtain a General Education Degree (GED); enroll in a vocational, community, or state college; take part in a program that will provide employment assistance; work for

at least 80 hours per month; or have a medical condition that will impede one of the above requirements (Lemley et al., 2013). Based on the study, and other studies, foster youth are not always fully prepared to emancipate. Further, it is believed that a typical person is ready to live on their own at the age of 26; yet foster youth are expected to be ready at the age of 18 or 21 (Packard et al., 2008). Perhaps AB 12 should extend services to foster youth up to the age of 26 as this would allow foster youth the time to prepare for independence and can prevent homelessness, unemployment, and government dependence. Further, AB 12 should be offered to any foster youth whether they meet the criteria, while in foster care, the youth can get help in order to meet the criteria.

#### Limitations

Even though the sample size was small, it still provides some information in regards to County data and can be expanded for future research. Further, the county data used is only for the State of California, thus it cannot be generalized for other states. This again, provides expansion for future research. Secondary data was used so the researcher had no control of the methods used to obtain the data. Further, the variance amongst counties was not

explored, as researcher did not have access to county specific data methods.

### Conclusion

The relationship between high school completion rates and independent living program participation in Counties indicates that emancipated youth can benefit from participation in the independent living program as that can help them with their high school completion. Further, the relationship between high school completion rates and permanency connection rates in Counties suggests that emancipated foster youth should establish permanent connections prior to emancipation so that they can have better outcomes. Having permanency connections allows foster youth to have a safety net. Moreover, the relationship between high school completion rates and housing obtainment rates in Counties suggests that emancipated youth benefit from completing high school so they can have access to housing. Further, completing high school will allow emancipated youth with more opportunities for future housing options.

APPENDIX  
DATA RETRIEVAL FORM



Data Retrieval Form for Each County in California

1. What is the name of the county? \_\_\_\_\_

- |                 |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Alameda      | 17. Orange          |
| 2. Butte        | 18. Riverside       |
| 3. Contra Costa | 19. Sacramento      |
| 4. El Dorado    | 20. San Bernardino  |
| 5. Fresno       | 21. San Diego       |
| 6. Glenn        | 22. San Luis Obispo |
| 7. Imperial     | 23. San Mateo       |
| 8. Kern         | 24. Santa Barbara   |
| 9. Lake         | 25. Santa Clara     |
| 10. Lassen      | 26. Santa Cruz      |
| 11. Los Angeles | 27. Solano          |
| 12. Madera      | 28. Sutter          |
| 13. Mariposa    | 29. Tehama          |
| 14. Merced      | 30. Tulare          |
| 15. Napa        | 31. Tuolumne        |
| 16. Nevada      |                     |

2. What is the graduation rate? \_\_\_\_\_

3. High school completion rate of emancipated youth? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the employment rate of emancipated youth? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the permanency connection rate of emancipated youth? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is housing obtainment rate of emancipated youth?  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is the Race and ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the Age group? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the Placement type? \_\_\_\_\_

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